

## Deacon Dan's homily for Sunday, December 29, 2019

### "Love grown and nurtured in a family is to be patterned after the love God"

Something that all of us, young, old, boys, girls, all of us share in common, is that we all come from a family. And, God created family so that we would have protection, moms and dads to look after us, to help us grow and learn, and know how to take care of ourselves when we grow up. The family is where we often first come to experience the balance of mercy and justice, forgiveness and reconciliation, and the joy and pain that comes with loving someone so deeply.

Jesus came from a family, he became incarnate into a human family and cast His love into a world opening the door for a family of believers to become one in Him. Pope Francis wrote in his Exhortation: Love in the Family, "The triune God is a communion of love, and the family is its living reflection. Saint John Paul II shed light on this when he said, "Our God in his deepest mystery is not solitude, but a family, for he has within himself fatherhood, sonship and the essence of the family, which is love. That love, in the divine family, is the Holy Spirit". The family is thus not unrelated to God's very being" (Francis. Love in the Family).

The family, whether a family as we most often refer to it, Mom, Dad, kids, grandparents, in-laws and relatives, or a family through love and association and a close-knit, common bond, such as can be found in some work settings, (in my past experience, the fire family was a second family) or within close friendships, or our Parish family; in its many forms the family is a creation of God intended for love to prosper, for the sharing and support of our lives, and to learn how to live a life centered on God.

Today, our God is speaking to us through these texts of Scripture. He gives us both by word and example how to live our lives in family. There are three important messages for us to take to heart and to take home. We must first arrange ourselves, prepare ourselves to listen to God and be obedient to Him. Second, being part of a family comes with responsibilities. And third, the kind of love grown and nurtured in a family is to be patterned after the love God gives to us; that is love that wills the good of the other; a self-emptying kind of love. In other words, it is other oriented, rather than self-love; ego-centered...all about me. But, none of this comes easy.

We live in a world that promotes the self; look at most of politics; that praises the ego, look at so many examples in professional sports; that places the race for honor, power, money and pleasure...in all their various forms, as the ultimate goal. This has always been the case in this world. We must first arrange ourselves, prepare ourselves to listen to God and be obedient to Him.

The story we just heard about the family of Jesus tells us that His family, Joseph and Mary, had struggles and problems, just like we have struggles and problems in our own families.

There are at least three times when Joseph faced difficult life and family problems and decisions. First, when he came to know that Mary was with child, and the child wasn't his. We heard this story just last Sunday and remember that he received direction from an angel to take Mary into his house. Second, when he was told by the angel, "Rise, take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you." And third, after being a refugee in Egypt for some time, Joseph is again directed by the angel of the Lord to "Rise, take the

child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead."

In each case Joseph received direction from God in a dream. In each case he listened to the message from God. Fellow men, if you're looking for a man's man, an example to pattern your life after; look to Joseph. He was a man of courage, a man of conviction, a man of integrity, a man who was right with God and cared for his family ahead of his needs and ahead of what people thought of him. His heart and his mind were open to hearing God's call and he trusted in God to say yes and do what God wanted him to do.

That is the call that each one of us has today; to listen carefully to God, to be open to hearing and trusting in Him. He may want to tell us something in a dream like Joseph, or speak to us through our spouse, or a trusted friend, teachers, or through our moms and dads.

But, we have to be open to listening and then trust in God, to say yes to Him and do what he is asking. And, so, yea, how do we arrange ourselves to listen to God?

Well, how do you listen to your husband or wife, or girlfriend, or boyfriend...how do you really listen to your best friend?

After, 45 years and 330 days of marriage, I am learning to stop whatever else I'm doing, I look at Terri, close my mouth, try not to think about how I'm going to fix her problem or situation...I just listen. I'm still practicing, sometimes I succeed. Then, I consider responding.

With other people we call this communication; with God we know this as a part of our prayer. Remember the prayer acronym from a couple of months ago: ACTS – Adoration, Confess, Thanks, and Supplication?

Second, being part of a family comes with responsibilities. We heard in our first reading the responsibilities we have toward our parents. This is the fourth Commandment: Honor thy father and mother. Being true to this Commandment has its promised rewards: it makes up for our own sins, our prayers will be heard, we will have a long life, we will be gladdened by children. As our parents age, it is especially important to do what we can to help them and be patient with them.

I've already sent a copy of this homily to our kids!

Every member of the family has responsibilities; wives – help your husbands be holy men. Men – love our wives, as we love our own selves, and be gentle and encourage our children. And, children, obey your parents to please the Lord.

And third, the kind of love grown and nurtured in a family is to be patterned after the love God gives to us; that is love that wills the good of the other; a self-emptying kind of love.

Practically speaking, Paul gives us the recipe for love in a family at home, a family at work or the family in this Catholic Parish. That is, to put on love, wear it, let it cover you and be seen and felt by others in our behavior toward one another through heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another.

This is the pattern of our lives toward one another. It is the pattern modeled for us by our Lord, Jesus. We are the images and the likeness of God. Through the graces of our Baptism, through the graces of receiving the Holy Eucharist, through our living our own path

to holiness, we become the living witnesses of the fullness of His love; a self-emptying, love that wills the good of another for the other.

On this 5th day in the Octave of Christmas we continue to celebrate the Gift. As John wrote, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him might not perish, but might have eternal life."

Merry Christmas!

The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph  
Lectionary: 17